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ABSTRACT

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Improvement Act of 1987 created an annual quality award to promote quality awareness, recognize the quality achievements of U.S. businesses, and publicize successful quality strategies. The criteria used to determine winners of the award focus on the delivery of increasingly better value to customers and the improvement of overall performance and capabilities. The Award criteria offer community colleges a focused, linked framework that can be used as a model for program assessment. To help colleges adapt the criteria, the Departments of Commerce and Education have jointly developed Baldrige-based criteria for educational institutions and have launched a pilot project to extend Award eligibility to educational institutions. Institutional areas examined by the criteria's seven categories include leadership, or how college administrators set direction and maintain an environment that fosters performance; strategic planning, or how internal and external factors are analyzed and translated into actionable plans; program development and delivery; personnel management to implement programs; and planning, program, and personnel development. The criteria provide a useful tool for assessing academic and non-academic programs. Moreover, the criteria focus on process rather than product and can help a college move from a crisis management approach to one of continual improvement of service. (MAB)

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# *USING THE BALDRIGE QUALITY AWARD FOR PROGRAM ASSESSMENT*

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Britt Watwood is the Assistant Director of the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy with a Masters degree in Education from Old Dominion University, Britt is currently completing his doctorate at UNL. Following retirement from the Navy at the rank of Commander, Britt brought to the Center 22 years of leadership experience, as well as six years specifically working in quality initiatives for the Department of Defense and the Navy. He continues his research on quality improvement, with particular emphasis on the application of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award to higher education. His dissertation is on the role played by community college chairs in leading their college quality initiatives. He is married to the former Linda Moreland of Annapolis, Maryland. Their twin daughters, Melissa and Stephanie,are in their third year of college.

# Using the Baldrige for Program Assessment

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## Summary

Program assessments are common in colleges and universities for accreditation and internal review. They generally give a snap shot view at a given time on the health of a program, but seldom focus on incremental and continuous improvements. A respected national model, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award criteria, offers a focused, linked framework which institutions of higher education can use as a model for program assessments. Department chairs and administrators will benefit, as Baldrige-based reviews are adaptable to varying units, levels, and types of colleges. This presentation provides background information on the Baldrige criteria and its use in educational assessment.

## Introduction

Everyone wants **quality**. Defining quality is, however, the subject of endless debate and clouded consensus. Colleges and universities frequently advertise their quality in brochures and guidebooks, but, like beauty, their quality if often in the eye of the beholder. There are no consistent standards to define quality.

The growth of formal assessment processes nationwide is a clear response to the public demand for increased accountability. In the past, there has been no clear coupling of assessment to quality. The community increasingly believes that higher education is doing a poor job, in spite of past assessments. Even with the Republican cutback in State Postsecondary Review Entries (SPRE's), a clear wake-up call has been issued. The increase in legislative oversight gives credence to Eisner's observation that "[w]e have inadvertently designed a system in which being good at what you do as a teacher is not formally rewarded, while being poor at what you do is seldom corrected nor penalized" (Simpson, 1992).

To respond to the public demand for improved efficiencies and increased quality, many colleges have turned to industry-based principles of quality as a means of "fixing" their systems. The past ten years has seen an explosion of literature on the quality movement, with Deming (1986), Juran (1988 and 1989), and Crosby (1979 and 1984) sparking the movement known as Total Quality Management (TQM). The concepts forwarded by these quality pioneers have been

applied to education by Seymour (1992, 1994, and 1995) and Cornesky (1993), among others. Synthesis of these related works generates the following common themes: a customer focus, continuous improvement, management by fact, benchmarking, respect for people, and use of a systems approach. A 1993 survey reported that seven in ten institutions of higher education were using TQM (Seymour, 1994).

Yet many institutions stumble as they prepare to implement their quality programs. The 1993 survey by Seymour indicated that only one in ten institutions was extensively using TQM. Hammons (1994) noted that TQM is not for every college - that it implies a mindset of unrelenting desire for quality, team-work, empowered employees, long-term thinking, and rewards for results. While these traits are desirable, many colleges today exhibit a willingness to settle for less, support divisive competitiveness between college departments, focus on the short-term, and have no reward system at all.

The problem (and the solution) lies not in the desire for quality but in the implementation of the processes used to achieve that quality (Brown, Hitchcock, and Willard, 1994). Administrators and faculty alike are looking for quick fixes. This implies linear thinking, with starts and stops, rather than the continuous improvement espoused in TQM. The quality movement suggests that circular thinking is needed instead. Deming preached the use of the "Shewart Cycle" of Plan-Do-Check-Act, which parallels the Japanese concept of *kaizen* - a series of small incremental improvements continually applied to processes (Deming, 1986, Imai, 1986). To be successful, colleges must take a long-term look at their programs, using a manageable process. I believe that the process college leaders are looking for may be found in another industry-based system that is migrating to education - the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

**The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award**

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Improvement Act of 1987 created an annual quality award for the United States that is similar to the Deming Prize awarded in Japan. The award has three purposes (Reimann, 1989):

- Promote quality awareness
- Recognize quality achievements of U.S. businesses, and
- Publicize successful quality strategies.

The award criteria are based on two-fold, results-driven goals of delivery of increasingly better (but profitable) value to customers, and second, improvement of overall performance and capabilities. While only a handful of innovative companies have "won" the award, thousands of organizations have looked to the rigorous award criteria as a means of self-assessment. *Yet, the word is not out.* In a recent survey of 108 community college chairs that I conducted, over 58% had not heard of the Baldrige Award. In the past eight years, the criteria have served as a major change agent in business, and an increasing number of educational organizations are now using them for self-assessment and planning. Because of the success of the Baldrige in raising the quality consciousness of corporate America, the Department of Commerce and the Department of Education jointly have developed award criteria applicable to educational institutions, and have launched a pilot project to extend eligibility to educational institutions

(U.S. Department of Commerce, 1994).

The beauty of the Baldrige lies not in the award but in the evaluative process behind it. The seven categories of award criteria offer the framework needed for college assessment. Each of these seven categories have specific areas that administrators can use to assess their programs. Self-studies built using these criteria can become living documents, driving continual renewal of programs and maximizing the human investment of time and energy consumed in a review. With their focus on *process* rather than *product*, the criteria move a college from a crisis management approach to one of continual improvement of service. Palmer (1994) criticized past evaluation processes because of their tendency to focus on actions rather than results. The Baldrige criteria force one to examine the *how* rather than the *what*, and in doing so, to move beyond bean-counting and towards real change.

**Use of the Baldrige Criteria**

A college or university does not have to actually apply to win the award in order to gain the benefits of the Baldrige. The concepts can be adapted and applied at all levels of the institution. The criteria provide an accepted, proven framework with which to assess the elusive concept of quality. By emphasizing process, much of the fear and resistance that normally exists when change is occurring is removed. Second, they focus on "value-added" performance. Quality that bankrupts a college is useless. Cost effectiveness that turns away constituents is useless. The dual focus on student/constituent satisfaction and school performance results place these criteria outside the theoretical realm and into the practical, giving chairs and other leaders the tools to move their college forward. Third, the criteria link leadership, planning, information management, and personnel management to the overall results, giving a framework for teamwork and empowerment. Finally, they are non-prescriptive - they never define what must be done, but give the college maximum flexibility to define their own quality levels through examination of processes. Seagren and associates (1994) noted that chairs must be prepared to transform their units through searching, self-examination, reflective thinking and development. The criteria offer excellent focus areas for this self-examination and reflection.

Thor (1994b) stated that the "failure of the leader to lead is one of the chief causes of failure in TQM implementation." The first category, Leadership, examines how college administrators personally set the direction for their units, developing and maintaining an environment that fosters performance excellence. This category addresses how this leadership team tackles the issues of the college vision, values, safety issues, and public citizenship of its students as they relate to performance expectations.

The next four categories are linked together in a systems approach. The strategic planning component reviews how strategic directions are set and how internal and external factors are analyzed and translated into actionable plans. The focus of the planning should be to use the human and program resources to achieve the goals of both multiple customer satisfaction and college viability. The next two categories look at program development and delivery, as well as the management of the people that make the programs a reality. The three categories of planning and program/personnel development are supported by measurable data, so that decisions are based on fact and credible benchmarks, and not supposition.



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Kibbee noted that the "quality of a university is measured more by the kind of student it turns out than the kind it takes in" (Simpson, 1992). The dual goals of the Baldrige process critically examine the quality of the student a college turns out, not forgetting at the same time the college's ability to remain viable. Rio Salado Community College has started this process, viewing students as members of the teaching-learning team, and involving them in feedback and assessment of their own learning (Thor, 1994a). However, LeTarte and Schwinn (1994) warn that all constituencies must be served, and not to focus solely on students as customers. They believe that students "are not the sole interpreters of quality or of appropriate service." The Baldrige criteria bring focus to this discussion by examining the expectations and satisfaction levels of current students, future students, and college stakeholders (parents, employers, other schools, communities, industrial partners, etc.), as well as the business success of the college.

## Summary

Mahoney and Thor (1994) state that the "Baldrige Award model is a management breakthrough; ... years of writing and research by management experts have yielded nothing as important as the Baldrige Award in terms of codifying the management process." College leaders need to become more familiar with the seven Baldrige Award criteria and the potential they afford for college improvement. They provide a usable tool for assessing academic and non-academic programs and developing strategies for continuous improvement. Through the process, quality becomes not a noun but a verb ... not a destination but a road on which one journeys. Application of the seven Baldrige criteria will help leaders in institutions of higher education chart a better course for this journey.

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